ARE OUR SCHOOLS DOING THE BEST KIND OF WORK?

Chas. M. Staley

There is a widespread belief that our schools are lacing in efficiency and in practical preparation for the common every-day duties of life. On all sides is heard the criticism that the schools are not thorough enough in the work they are doing. Business men say that they can find among high school graduates only a few who are proficient in such essential subjects as spelling, writing, arithmetic, and language. High school teachers complain that the pupils from the elementary schools cannot read intelligently, have not been drilled thoroughly in spelling and writing, and have not mastered the fundamental operations in arithmetic. College professors at times make some very uncomplimentary remarks about the kind of work the high schools are doing in preparing students for college. Even the sensational magazines, which are quick to seize upon any general feeling of dissatisfaction, have raised an outcry, and are devoting pages to a discussion of what is the matter with our schools. These criticisms have become so general and so pronounced that thoughtful persons everywhere are inquiring into the causes of this unsatisfactory condition of affairs, and are considering carefully what shall be done to improve matters. Some suggest as a remedy an increase in the length of the school term; others say that by increasing the salaries of teachers better work will be done in the schools; while still others say that improvement will be secured only by giving the teachers special training in the art of teaching. It is very evident that something must be done. If it be true that our high schools graduate pupils who cannot spell correctly words in common use, who cannot write an intelligent business letter, or who cannot solve a problem in partial payments or compound interest, then there is something radically wrong with our conception of what constitutes a practical education. If it be true that every year thousands of children go out from our schools without having mastered the fundamental principles of even the elementary branches, then it is high time to go to work to bring about a change.

During the last quarter of a century a large increase has been made in the number of subjects in the course of study in the elementary schools, and the number of text books required to be taught has more than doubled. The same is true of the work in the high schools. This, perhaps, is one of the principal causes of the unsatisfactory work done in the schools. The attempt has been made to teach too many subjects, and the result has been that none have been taught thoroughly. Instead of concentrating their efforts upon the essential subjects, teachers have wasted their time and energy in trying to stress equally all the subjects in the course of study. The pupils have acquired smattering ideas about many things, but have not mastered any one subject.

About fifteen years ago an insistent demand was made by the men in charge of the preparatory schools that the colleges would raise their entrance requirements. It may have been that these men were actuated by selfish motives, for it would be a financial advantage to the academies and high schools to have their pupils remain as many years as possible. At any rate the clamor became so great that finally the colleges yielded to the pressure. Many subjects then taught in the colleges have been put in the high school course of study; and some subjects then in the high school curriculum have been placed in the elementary schools.

Men who entered college fifteen or twenty years ago know that plane and solid geometry, ancient history, rhetoric and literature, botany, Cicero and Virgil, physics, German and French, and chemistry were considered subjects belonging strictly to college work. At that time English grammar, arithmetic, advanced geography, United States history, algebra, Latin grammar and Caesar, physiology, and physical geography constituted, in the main, the work of the high school. But now even the rural high schools, those with but one teacher, are expected to teach plane and solid geometry, physics, English history, ancient history, botany, Cicero and Virgil, chemistry, rhetoric and literature, German and French. While such subjects as English grammar arithmetic, United States history, advanced geography, North Carolina history, and phyiology have been relegated, for the most part, to the elementary schools. Also in the present scheme of work pupils in the elementary schools and in the high schools have from five to seven recitations a day, not less than twenty-five a week, while students at college have about fifteen a week, or three a day. It would seem that the elementary schools have to do much that is really high school work, and that the high schools are required to teach many subjects which belong to college work. Is it any wonder that the schools, under such conditions, are not doing as thorough work as they should do? How can we expect the high school pupil to master his studies when he has so many recitations a day, and when many of the subjects are beyond his comprehension? Or do we really believe that boys and girls sixteen years old have reached that stage of mental development at which they can understand fully the abstract reasoning of demonstrative geometry, can appreciate the literary excellence of Cicero and Virgil, can enjoy the logic of Burke and Webster, or can assimilate the philosophical teachings of Shasepeare and Goethe.

Along with this increase in the number of subjects required to be taught there have been great changes in the methods of teaching. The scholars of a preceding generation had only a few subjects of study, but these they were expected to master by their own efforts. Now the pupil has many subjects of study, and the teacher is expected to make the paths of knowledge very smooth for the halting feet. Then the scholar had to solve his problems in arithmetic for himself, and carry them to the teacher for inspection; now the teacher spends much time in explaining the problems to the pupil, after which a number of problems is assigned for home study. Of course no teacher ever suspects that the pupil gets his parents to solve all his problems for him. In the ungraded school of that time every scholar advanced in his studies according to his individual ability; in our modern graded system the bright pupil is held back with his grade, and the dull pupil is dragged along with his class. Then the scholar was trained to be self-reliant and to depend upon his own unaided efforts; now the pupil, in many instances, depends upon his teacher, his parents, or his classmates to do his work for him. Then the scholar was required to do much studying at school under the eye of the teacher; now the pupil does the greater part of his studying away from the school, if he does very much actual studying anywhere. Which method do you think will develop the more progressive self-reliant student?

In political campaigns we often hear the slogan, "Back to first principles." If the old-time school, with its few subjects of study and its old-time methods of teaching, did more does the modern school with its up-to-thorough work and developed a more self-reliant spirit in its scholars than date methods, then it would not be amiss for us to study carefully some of those old-time principles. To be sure we have for several years been energetically lambasting these methods, and have been vociferously jeering at those who dared to speak up for the ungraded school and its work. It would be very humiliating to our pedagogical pride to have to admit that those old fellows did, perhaps, do some things better than we are doing them. By-the-way, is it not surprising that many of our leading schools are going back to the blue-back speller with its oral phonetic drill on syllables and words? Is it not strange that many prominent teachers are now advocating the use of the diagrams, analysis, and parsing in Reed and Kellogg's grammars? And what shall we think of those educators who boldly say that our boasted graded system does not develop the spirit of individual effort on the part of the pupil as did the old ungraded school? Why some even go so far as to say that the more nearly we can get our school ungraded, broken up into small groups or sections, the better the work can be done.

The proof of the pudding is in the eating. If it be true that our schools are not doing as thorough work as they should do, then it is high time that we begin to study these questions in all seriousness and without any bias or prejudice. If we are trying to teach too many subjects in our schools, if we are trying to do in the elementary schools work that rightly belong to the high schools, then we should make a change in our courses of study. If we are trying to teach in our high schools subjects that can be taught more successfully in college, then we should make a demand on the colleges to take back the work that belongs to them. If our methods of teaching do not train the pupil to do his own work, to be self-reliant, and to depend upon his own efforts, then we should change our methods. Or if the trouble is not along these lines, but is to be found at some other point in our school economy, then we should strive diligently to remove the trouble and to bring about a change for the better. We have made great progress in many matters of educational advancement, and we should see to it that the improvement in teaching does not fall behind the improvements along other lines. For after all, the work done in the school room, the actual development of the child's mental capabilities, is the all important thing.

Hickory, N. C.

Governor Should Take Notice.

Wilmington Star.

We appreciate the fact that continual harping on one subject may serve to subject a newspaper to criticism, alike as to its taste, its paucity of ideas, and its motives. Some matters of comment, however, will not wait for reference and do not wane in importance because of opinion freely expressed. Hence—it is "Shemwell again."

The Star was the first paper in the State to express its gratification at the refusal of the Supreme Court to grant Shemwell a new trial. It took this unusual course for the reason that the man seems to be out of date in this country—a braggart, a bully, a self-professed desperado. It declared that his imprisonment would be salutary for the example it would set the people of the State generally that, notwithstanding Shemwell and others might terrorize their towns or cities—might even so far impress themselves as dangerous men upon their counties as to escape the usual punishments put upon crime—it was impossible for them to persist to the end either of terrorizing or influencing a State. When, on affidavits, Governor Kitchin granted Shemwell a reprieve, we granted him an honesty of purpose, and, while suspecting Shemwell, stated that the Governor was necessarily concluded by the evidence offered him. We wished that Shemwell be punished, but did not criticise the Governor for delaying execution of the sentence.

On top of the reprieve Shemwell supposed to be under treatment at Hot Springs, returned to the State, paraded himself in Lexington, and appeared to be in perfect health. In the meantime he failed to appear at Guilford court, and forfeited his bond. We then took the ground that the affidavits representing him to be too sick to go to jail were, on their face, deceptive, since the facts were that Shemwell was able to undergo the fatigue of travel and, in his own person, gave the lie to that which had been represented concerning him. Later developments are that Shemwell's son makes declarations that at the time the reprieve was granted his father was at Hot Springs for treatment; that he came back at his son's request on the mission of renewing the bond for his appearance at Guilford court, and that he had since returned to Hot Springs to continue treatment. After this the Charlotte Observer printed a dispatch from Hot Springs stating that Shemwell was not there, and since that time he has been seen again in North Carolina.

In view of all these facts the Star called on Governor Kitchin to make an expression in respect to a case involving the honor of the State. The expression came yesterday, and to say the very least it is disappointing. The Governor says that there is no evidence that deception was used to obtain the reprieve, and that if it is made to appear to him that deception was used, he will act. And while he was in the very act of making this statement to newspaper men, C. H. Mebane, a clerk in the service of the State, walked into the Governor's office and told him that Shemwell was again back in the State, apparently in perfect health and not suffering from rheumatism in the least. To which, as reported in the Star's Raleigh correspondence, Governor Kitchin made the "comment on the situation that he sees no reason why Shemwell should not travel about if occasion requires, as he has his reprieve to April 1st."

Of course Governor Kitchin has the power to grant a reprieve of his own motion, generosity and kindliness. If these are his reasons, he should so state them. But when he puts his reprieve on the ground that the condition of the prisoner is such as to render his imprisonment dangerous to his life, he avoids the responsibility which he might have taken, on the ground of humanity. When he does that he at that instant takes the people into partnership in the exercise of his discretion. It is not his personal act, but the act of the agent of the State to express its merciful and humane character. Therefore, when the prisoner, reprieved as one in a critical condition of health, returns brazenly to show the manner in which he has hoodwinked the Governor, it makes more difference than Governor Kitchin seems to appreciate that he should travel about while under reprieve, at his own sweet will. The man who can endure nights on a Pullman without physical hurt can easily endure life in a jail. The reason for the reprieve was the necessity for expert medical treatment. If the prisoner chooses not to take the treatment—and therefore, presumably, does not need it—the reason for clemency fails. Governor Kitchin makes a blunder in attempting to protect a man reprieved for cause, which proved to be no cause. If he wishes the responsibility of permitting Shemwell to flaunt the law, let him take it, instead of attempting to avoid or justify it.

Again, where are the Guilford authorities? Shemwell's bond is forfeited, a writ for his retaking has issued. Why does the sheriff of Guilford not exert himself to execute the writ? He, as well as Governor Kitchin, is no court bound by strict construction of what is and is not judicial notice. They both know the facts. It would redound to the decency of the State if they would act upon them.

Shemwell vs. State.

Charlotte Observer.

The Observer does not believe that anything can be gained by the disposition shown here and there to engage in special pleading as regards the Shemwell case. Governor Kitchin made a very unfortunate and easily avoidable mistake. At once Baxter Shemwell converted the whole affair into a farce. Supposed to be at Hot Springs, Ark., suffering acutely from rheumatism, he paraded through three North Carolina towns without even the decent pretense of disability. Probably the Governor would have learned of at least one performance in time had not the desire to avoid increasing Shemwell's hostility worked a suppression of the news. Until The Observer put a staff correspondent on the trail, only vague rumors went out through news papers or otherwise Shemwell made the law appear ridiculous and contemptible as even he had never succeeded in doing before. We trust that Governor Kitchin will never again deal with a man "in the woods" (see State vs. Keebler, 145 N. C. Reports), and above everything when this man has a record like Shemwell's and submits only physicians' certificates relating to an ailment which any one can feign easily. Shemwell may suffer discomfort at times from rheumatism; many or or most men of his age do, a considerable proportion severely; but it would have been quite sufficient, we are sure, to order any needed modification of prison conditions. A comfortably furnished room in a steam-heated building would be no great hardship at the very worst.

This matter derives its importance from the fact that the law has been made to cut about the sorriest figure imaginable. Shemwell is not pardoned, only reprieved; but the reprieve was granted unwisely, and has had most unfortunate results. For the worts of those results no one can be blamed except Shemwell himself. In his despardo spirit he acted very badly toward the Governor and doubtless caused undeserved embarrassment for his son, whom we understand to be an estimable young man.

About the absolute good faith in which Governor Kitchin acted., there can be no question at all. We have not the least reason to believe that the physicians or any one else concerned acted badly except Shemwell himself. With this we take leave of what by reason of its nature has been an unpleasant subject

CORN AND COTTON PREMIUMS.

The Bank of Lmberton Offers Premiums for Best Yields of Corn in Robeson and The Robesonian Offers Premiums for Best Yields of Cotton.

(Lumberton Robesonian.)

At a meeting of the board of directors of the Bank of Lumberton a few days ago it was decided to offer three premiums aggregating $100 for the greatest yields of corn on one acre in Robeson. A prize of $50 will be given for the greatest yield, $30 for the second, $20 for the third.

No restrictions will be made as to amount of fertilizer that shall be used or as to how land shall be prepared. Those who intend to enter the contest will notify the Bank of Lumberton, giving address and where land is located on which the corn is to be raised, and rules and regulations governing the contest will be mailed to them. At harvest time three disinterested men will be appointed to measure the land and the corn, so there will be no question as to the fairness of the contest.

The Robesonian has decided to offer for the best yield of cotton on an acre in Robeson next year two prizes, aggregating $75. For the best yield a prize of $50 will be given and for the second best yield a prize of $25.

This contest will be open to any one who is now a subscriber or who becomes a subscriber by the first of September next. Those who enter the contest will send their names to the paper, giving addresses, etc., and at the proper time three disinterested judges will be selected to decide as to the winners of the prizes. Beyond being confined to Robesonian subscribers there will be no rules and regulations. It is simply a matter of who raises the most cotton on an acre of land.

PREFERS TO BE A LIVE COWARD.

Discharged Chicago Policeman Tells Why He Let Murderer Escape.

Chicago, Dec. 21.—Imagine a policeman saying: "I'd rather be a live coward than a dead hero. I don't care to take chances on getting shot for $75 a month. I'm not afraid of any man living if I can get an even break; but I'm not stopping murderers when they've got the drop on me; and I don't know much about shooting irons.

"It's better to say, 'There he goes' than 'Here he lies.'"

This is the gist of the statement made by Emil E. Kohler, till yesterday a patrolman of the Maxwell street station, who was discharged for cowardice in failing to arrest the murderer of Barnett Greenberg, who was shot to death by a robber in his pawn shop Monday night.

Joys are our wings, sorrows are our spurs.—Richter.